

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF

DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH

A NONPROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF PUBLIC SAFETY STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES

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DWCO Services



And the Greatest Is Love 2016 © Caterina Spinaris, PhD

Who does not want to be resilient and happy, and have a long and healthy life? I'd venture to say, most, if not all of us, do! The key is how to get to that place, and how to find our way back to that sweet spot after getting blown off course by some of life's turbulence. To achieve these goals, we need to know and practice behaviors that contribute to enduring resilience, to happiness, and to an improved quality and perhaps even length of life.

In this and subsequent articles I'd like to discuss some of the factors that research has shown promote resilience, happiness, well-being, and even longevity.

To start with, I want to highlight some research evidence on the factor of social relationships, as good relationships seem to be a major contributor to resilience, happiness and well-being.

According to a report¹ in which 270 relevant studies on resilience were examined, the following were found to be among the factors that were strong resilience boosters in military populations: family support, a positive military command climate, and community belongingness.

Family Support refers to perceiving that comfort is available from, and can be provided to, others, and includes emotional, informational, instrumental, tangible, and spiritual support.

Positive Command Climate, in the context of military units, includes facilitating and fostering positive interactions within a unit, effective leadership, and positive role modeling.

Community Belongingness includes the integration of the individual in their community, friendships, and participation in spiritual/faith-based organizations, protocols, ceremonies, social services, and schools, among others.

According to another study² mortality of older married individuals was found to be significantly reduced for those who reported providing instrumental support to friends, relatives, and neighbors, and for individuals who reported providing emotional support to their spouse. Receiving support had no effect on mortality when giving support was taken into consideration. That is, the key ingredient for increased longevity was the *giving of support*.

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Interestingly, in a study of corrections professionals, DWCO [research](#)³ established that *supportive staff relationships efforts (giving support to other staff) increased the giver's resilience*. Specifically, the following behaviors were found to promote the resilience of GIVERS of these behaviors:

- Supporting others through communication (e.g., validations, acknowledgements)
- Talking to others about best practices and lessons learned
- Seizing opportunities to encourage teamwork and collaboration
- Exerting effort to maintain professional relationships or repair damaged ones
- Making efforts to “stay connected” to other staff
- Taking advantage of opportunities to improve the workplace environment generally

Similarly, research on authentic happiness⁴ examined the effects of having strong ties to friends and family, and committing to spend time with them. The study found that strong personal relationships contributed to a sense of genuine happiness and a lower number of depression symptoms, compared to study participants who did not report strong personal relationships. The authors concluded that good social relations are necessary for happiness.

Another contributor to the resilience of corrections professionals was found to be, in the context of *self-care—acting to ensure that their relationships with significant others were healthy/satisfactory*³. More specifically, the following behaviors that targeted the quality of personal relationships were found to boost resilience of corrections staff:

- Taking steps to ensure engaging in activities and enjoyment during time outside of work
- Taking steps to address potential personal relationship difficulties related to workplace stress
- Taking steps to stay emotionally connected with others outside the workplace
- Letting go of workplace issues when returning home after their shift
- Maintaining an optimistic frame of mind (which makes a person easier to be around)
- Letting go of anger related to workplace frustrations, so it does not affect one's personal time and relationships

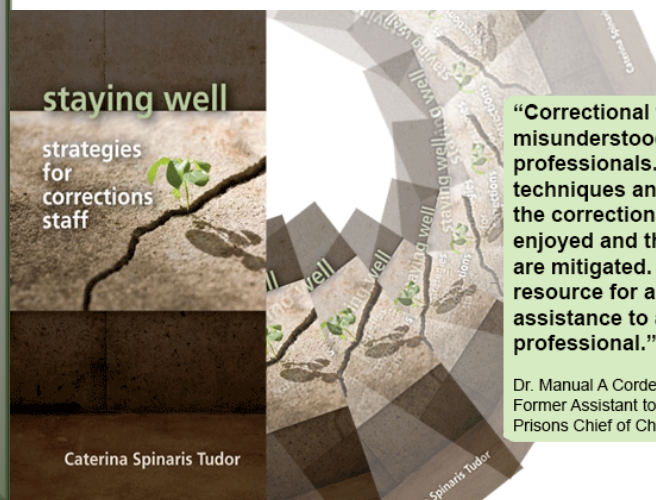
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Dr. Manual A Cordero
Former Assistant to the Bureau of
Prisons Chief of Chaplains

And the Greatest Is Love (continued from page 2)**Page 3**

Perhaps it would not be much of a leap to equate having strong and supportive relationships to having loving relationships, where love in various forms is given and received in a back and forth loop. If so, what would love look like in action? What are basic attitudes and behaviors that characterize loving relationships, and which can apply to all types of relationships and interactions— be it in one's family, one's community, or in the workplace?

Here is a partial list of some attitudes and behaviors that convey love:

- Listening well to hear what is said and what is implied (“the story behind the news”), making time to hear people out. This requires caring, respect and patience. Paul Tillich said that the first duty of love is to listen.
- Seeing the good in people, and identifying and pointing out their specific strengths.
- Encouraging others when they're down and tempted to give up.
- Letting people know that you believe that they can improve and grow.
- Cheering people on as they make efforts to improve and to accomplish goals.
- Rejoicing with people when they rejoice, and mourning with them when they mourn. This requires empathy, the capacity to put yourself in their shoes and understand where they are coming from.
- Being compassionate toward others who are suffering, both verbally and through practical acts of service.
- Taking the necessary steps to make time to spend quantity and quality time with those who matter to you.
- Celebrating their successes with them without giving in to envy and the temptation to undermine them.
- Working hard on resolving disagreements and conflicts through dialogue, even if at times that means agreeing to respectfully disagree.
- Asking for forgiveness and/or making amends for your wrongdoing, failures or for dropping the ball.
- Forgiving/letting go of grudges, and starting afresh without bringing up past failures or wrongdoing again. This is a step that people have to work out in their own minds and hearts, as letting go of grudges looks different to different people.

As stated in past articles, and based on DWCO's [research](#) and clinical experience, psychological traumatization is an inherent occupational risk in corrections. In the context of the current article's discussion of the contribution of social relationships to resilience, happiness, and well-being, it is critical to note that several of the cardinal symptoms of PTSD undermine social connections, and interfere with the capacity to have healthy relationships and to love.

For example, according to the DSM-5⁵, one of the symptoms of PTSD is a persistent inability to experience positive emotions, such as loving feelings of affection or tenderness. One can only imagine the effects of that on relationships.

Two other related PTSD symptoms also affect social interactions. These are “feelings of detachment or estrangement from others” and “markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities.”⁵ Again, it is not difficult to see how these symptoms would sabotage relationships.

Additionally, the PTSD symptom of avoiding (or making efforts to avoid) people, places and events that are reminders of trauma can interfere with what could otherwise be satisfying and enjoyable social interactions and activities⁵. Traumatized persons either do not participate at all, or if they do, they remain aloof and/or cut such engagements short.

And lastly, PTSD can result in “irritable behavior and angry outbursts (with little or no provocation) typically expressed as verbal or physical aggression toward people or objects.”⁵ Obviously, such behaviors can poison and even destroy relationships.

So, not only does PTSD affect sufferers in terms of their experiencing haunting memories and related physiological symptoms, it also interferes with and undermines one of their most important resources for healing and recovery—their relationships and social support systems.

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And the Greatest Is Love (continued from page 3)

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Since corrections staff (and in particular security/custody staff) and other first responders suffer from post-traumatic symptoms at much higher rates than the general population, it is critical that they discipline themselves to make every effort to protect, preserve and enhance their key relationships. That is, they need to deliberately and often engage with others in enjoyable activities, connect emotionally with trusted others by sharing personal feelings and thoughts, express caring and affection, and provide support to coworkers, relatives and friends. The pursuit of positive social interactions has to be intentional and focused. Certain such activities have to be scheduled in the calendar just like high-priority medical appointments, otherwise they will not happen.

In conclusion, giving support and having loving interactions are major contributors to well-being and psychological resilience, and perhaps even to longevity. They form the foundation on which other factors that promote resilience and well-being can be built.

And now I'd like to close with a true story of what I consider to be "love in action" in corrections.

A while back I received the following email from a Correctional Officer, with the subject "How do you offer assistance?" It is reproduced here with permission, and with all identifying details removed or altered.

"I am acquainted with a supervisor who works second watch. I work third. I only see him for about 15 minutes during shift change. He told me that he is in the process of losing a very significant and long-term relationship. I can tell by his words and from personal experience that he is about to go down a dark road. And I can tell that he is contemplating the final choice. Any ideas on how to approach the subject and share that I have been there and that a new life and experience can be afforded to him?"

After thanking the writer for his concern and for going out of his way to show caring to the supervisor, I replied: "Express your caring and concern to the supervisor. Tell him you've been down that road, that it hurt like crazy, but that you got through it, and perhaps share what healthy strategies helped you. Don't minimize the pain of the loss, as if someone can easily be replaced. Most importantly I recommend you let administrators and/or a psychologist at your facility know your concerns so a psychologist can talk to him, assess the situation, intervene as needed, and offer him resources. I know that staff may be reluctant to 'rat' on a friend, but this is not ratting. It is about doing all you can to avert or lessen the risk of a tragic event happening. And keep offering support to him, such as getting together after work—without alcohol being involved. Give him the number for the national lifeline, 800-273-8255, and SAFE CALL NOW at 206-459-3020, a hotline for first responders, including corrections staff. You can also offer to go with him to a counseling appointment and wait in the waiting room. I also know of people who stayed with someone at their house or had them stay at theirs till they got over the crisis phase. As you're well aware, people going through loss like you're describing can be overwhelmed by emotional pain. They need to grieve, but oftentimes don't know how to do that in healthy ways. Be there to help him grieve."

I received this reply the very next day:

"Thank you for your kind words and advice. Today I was able to talk to him and I was also able to connect him with our peer support group at our facility."

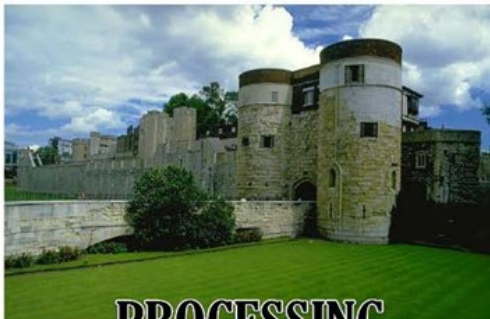
To me, this situation exemplifies love in action 100%. This Correctional Officer noted the need, and went out of his way to seek help for this supervisor (whom he did not even know well). His actions could very well have saved this person's life. At the very least, they helped encourage that individual, point him to resources, and let him know he matters, that others care sincerely about him.

And according to what research shows, the Correctional Officer was blessed abundantly for his caring. He received a boost to his own sense of happiness/joy and resilience simply by reaching out to someone else in need.

(Continued on page 5)

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PROCESSING CORRECTIONS WORK

A Workbook to
Combat Corrections Fatigue
and Increase Corrections Fulfillment

Written and Organized by
Caterina Spinaris and Gregory Morton

Cover Design and Illustrations by Elizabeth Gamache

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Balance—Policy vs. Practice

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This article addresses the unavoidable juggling act administrators and supervisors must perform on an ongoing basis—juggling staff's (and their own) "off" time and the conducting of operations 24/7.

Balance is a term that is often used to describe a need for employees to have a full, well-rounded life in order to improve their health and increase their job efficiency. When I was a warden I included this concept in my philosophical statement because I believed that balance is critical and that corrections cannot be anyone's whole life.

As I travel around the country, I have the opportunity to interact with many different corrections professionals. When I ask them if their agency believes in balance, they usually hesitate before they answer. Then, the answers I usually get indicate a difference between what is said and what is done—between policy and practice.

This idea of balance is a relatively new concept in the corrections world. Before women became a large part of the corrections workforce, the accepted thought was that men didn't need balance because their wives took care of all parts of their life outside of work. When women began to enter the corrections workforce, and increased to the current point of 35% of the workforce, conversations regarding the need to balance work, family and life with corrections work began. Not surprisingly, the early conversations were not always supportive of this evolving concept.

Eventually, many correctional leaders began to discuss the need to increase employee wellness and health. Balance was a natural part of this discussion. However, another important change was occurring at the same time, the increase of mobile communication. Consequently, while the idea of balance and the need for time off or "down" time from work was becoming a popular topic, at the same time cheap and effective cellular services were being put on the hip of most of the correctional management employees.

Now, we can reach out and make contact with many correctional employees easily and instantly. This is an important change in the way we manage correctional facilities. When contact was more difficult, we only contacted management staff when it was truly an emergency. Now, we can make contact and expect immediate answers for some of the most mundane and non-emergent issues. This has resulted in many employees never really being off duty.

Another important result of improved mobile communication affects line officers who work in facilities where they are often asked to work overtime or on their days off. Many of our line officers do not possess the traditional home phone line and the only way to make contact is through their cell phones. As a result, officers either do a great job of call screening, or they run the risk of getting called back to work on a regular basis. Again, this has resulted in many officers describing a feeling of having to hide from work in order just to get a day off.

So, when I ask correctional employees if their facility believes in balance I am often told that they hear the word a lot, but they don't really feel like the facility values this concept. It is ironic that the corrections culture has begun to at least give lip service to this need for down time and a balanced life, while at the same time they are employing a variety of electronic options to ensure that their employees are never really disconnected from their work.

I encourage all correctional leaders—present and future leaders—to really think about this contradiction. Perhaps some of the mundane and non-emergent inquiries can really wait until that employee returns to work. Or perhaps, some of the electronic tethers that are used to tie employees to their work can be removed.

Remember: if an employee has a balanced life, not only are they likely to be healthier and more satisfied with their personal life, they are often also a better performing employee!

Another One Bites the Dust

By The Old Screw

This article is reprinted from the November 2007 issue of the Correctional Oasis.

These are words to a song, but they can also apply to correctional staff. It gets old hearing it apply to staff, but it's a way of life. For those of you who don't understand what this means, it means that staff have compromised themselves with inmates again, costing them their job and their career. No, this does not mean only female staff, but all staff. This problem exists in every state in the Union, and in prisons all over the world. Staff is warned time and time again in training and on the job to not turn to inmates for friendship, and also to watch out for inmates playing games.

Most staff are good people, but there are many factors that can take them down, if not dealt with. Low self-esteem, marriage problems, debts, loneliness, anger over not getting a promotion, resentment against fellow staff for taking excess time off, and a thousand and one other factors. NO, no one can be made to do anything they don't want to do, but words of kindness can hook you if they make you feel good. Thinking that only an inmate understands you and your emotions, that no one else cares about what you're going through with a sick wife or child, or the bills piling up, can get a staff member to cross the line with an inmate.

WAKE UP!!! The hard truth is that most inmates don't care about you or your family. All they are thinking about are the benefits you can give them—from sex (female and male) to contraband, to whatever. Always remember, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS INNOCENT CONTRABAND. Anything you bring in is a nail in the coffin of your career and job.

Also, some staff think that they can confide in an inmate and the inmate will not tell anyone. Well, guess again, my friend. ANYTHING you tell an inmate is public knowledge in the inmate population or it will be when he/she gets everything they can out of you.

I do not know how many female staff have fallen for an inmate and lived happily ever after, but if you could find out, I think it would be less than a handful in the whole country. Everyone wants to be loved and wanted, but a male or female inmate is not the answer. I've known several female staff that have lost their jobs and careers. Not a one of them are still with the inmate that they gave up everything for.

I would love to never hear the words ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST again except in the song of the same name. I would love to never hear about another Staff being walked out the front gate, with a promising career shot down the drain. Will this happen? I'm afraid not, but it is a good wish and a good prayer.

If you are feeling some of what I described here, talk to someone.

THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE, LIKE AT DESERT WATERS, WHO REALLY CARE ABOUT YOU AND YOURS!!!!!!!!!!!!

Take Care,

The Old Screw

Voluntary Trek into the Combat Zone

Anonymous

This describes trauma aspects of security/custody work most eloquently. Emphasis added. Reprinted with permission.

I've been retired from law enforcement since 2006. My career began working in two Texas state prisons and ended in a Texas county corrections facility. It wasn't until a year into retirement that I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress. I suspect that I had it long before my retirement, but either didn't know it or I was in denial. I like to think that I'm dealing with this responsibly as I try to maintain control and sanity in my life through medication and counseling. I'm resigned to the fact I may live with this condition till I die.

Anybody who thinks this job, especially in the prisons, is not a daily, voluntary trek into an active combat zone is either woefully unaware of their surroundings, or they've never worked the line.

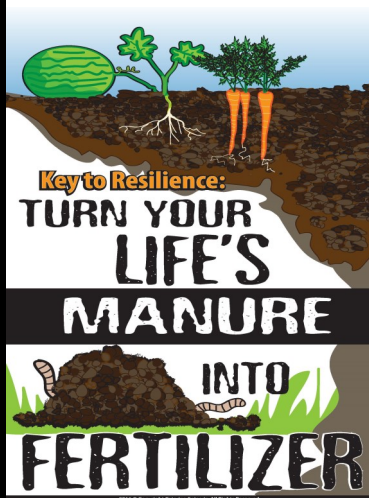
Akin to the military, we get up in the morning (or later in the day depending on what shift you work) and put on our uniform. We report in and check out all the equipment we will need for the shift. We report to our operational area and receive our briefing. We relieve the last post and assume the duties. We check our guns, count our rounds, inventory and check all our systems, and then we start the business of trying to survive the horrors we are bound to face, courtesy of the inmate population.

We are peacekeepers, and could be easily compared to an occupying force of a small town. We don't live in the town, but we patrol it and try to keep the residents from killing each other and us. Many of the residents would happily see us dead or dying. During our shift in the war zone, we witness violence, death, loss, suffering and depravity that is unimaginable to most people. **We do not have the luxury of stopping to vomit or pause to cry.** Every moment must be regarded as precious time for interdicting drugs, gangs, weapons, vice, rape and murder. **We bear witness to daily evil.** As if that were not enough, **we must be able to chronicle this evil in utter detail by creating a detailed report for use in a courtroom. We must remember, because it is our duty to bear witness in the interest of justice.**

The war zone stays with us, at home, long after we retire or quit.

And so, we carry our burden through our career, retirement and then to the grave. We cannot forget.

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Quote of the Month

"The greatest weakness of most humans is their hesitancy to tell others how much they love them while they're alive."

~O.A. Battista

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IN MEMORIAM

Reg Cowie

Desert Waters South Africa
12/08/2015

Reg simply LOVED Corrections Officers. In his last email to us he was ecstatic about his latest delivery of the CF2F course to staff at a South African prison. We miss his cheerfulness, faith, faithfulness, and passion. We pray that someone else will step up to fill his shoes in South Africa. And we send our condolences to Reg's wife Nancy who supported him wholeheartedly in his corrections mission.

Article

[The Mental Health Crisis in the
Corrections Profession](#)

Many Thanks!

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To promote the occupational, personal and family well-being of the public safety workforce through the provision of support, resources and customized data-driven solutions.